

The leading role of expert communities in modern organizations

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Abstract This paper focuses on the leading role of expert communities in the modern society. The aim of our research is to broaden current knowledge of expert systems in the field of management sociology. The authors present the main sociological theories of foreign and Russian scientists that are related to the problems of expert systems. The paper analyses such issues as expert knowledge, expert communities, experts, expert systems, and the expertise itself. This is followed by the discussion of an expert community as a new leadership style in modern organizations. Our results might be of some interest for the managers, stakeholders as well as social scientists dealing with all spheres of management and governance.

1 Introduction

The prefix “post” is the key word of our times (Beck 1992a). He argues that as soon as the term “postmodernism” appears in the discourse, everything blurs, and it is difficult to grasp the very meaning. Modern society is a society of rapid and, most often, quite radical changes. Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in post-industrial society, postmodern society, the late modernity, the information society and globalization. This topic is certainly sharp and controversial, but it is safe to say that the changes concern all spheres of public life.

Together with the discourse of modernity and modern society, the topics of expert knowledge, expert communities, experts, expert systems and expertise are often raised (Litau 2017; Blaginin et al. 2019; McArthur and Robin 2019; or Yuan et al. 2019). It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by expert communities. Expert communities usually imply professional expertise systems that organize our social life everywhere. Simply put, we all, someone less often, someone more often, are faced with the need to apply to a community of experts, whether it is a doctor or a lawyer.

Within the sphere of management sociology expert communities are of interest in the context of collective management (Chiapello and Fairclough 2002). Collective management in the organization involves a creation of expert communities with the involvement of down managers, middle managers as well as top management (Strielkowski et al. 2017). The purpose of creating precisely this expert communities in the organization is its more effective work. As a result of this management style, an active role in the creation and application of expert knowledge is transferred to ordinary employees who are directly involved in interacting with customers, suppliers etc. Thus, leadership moves from top management to other categories of employees. Surely, a large number of factors must be kept in mind in the development of this management system, such as, for example, the unwillingness of some employees to participate in management decision making. Moreover, it is important to take into account expert knowledge, which is located outside the organization. The internal expert community, which has external information from customers, business partners and the media, will help the organization to function properly and be competitive. Throughout it all, of course, the structured and systematic nature of the applied analysis is very important (Dolgushev 2017).

This paper is organized as follows: it begins by providing an overview of the most famous concepts of expert systems in modern sociology (Beck, Giddens, Berger, and Luckmann). This is followed by a brief theoretical discussion on expert communities in organizations. Finally, the paper provides some conclusions and discussions on the topic.

2 Expert systems in Beck's risk society

Beck put forward the concept of a "risk society" in the context of the discussion about modernization, which, in his opinion, endowed society with a large number of problems. The author draws a historical analogy and argues that: *"just as modernization dissolved the structure of feudal society in the nineteenth century and produced the industrial society, modernization today is dissolving industrial society and another modernity is coming into being"* (Beck 1992b). Risk society is a product of the development of industrial society, the stage of modernization of social life, the stage of "reflexive modernization" or "high modern".

It is important to emphasize that the problem of risk has arisen in sociology before, but Beck was one who introduced these issues into a wider turn. According to Beck, risks are not any consequences of human life and activities, but risks are produced by the society itself, and in all spheres, such as economics, politics or social sphere. Modernization results in, among other things, an increasing wave of individualization, which leads to an increase in the individualization of decision-making. Risks, in turn, arise where there is a need to make decisions, which means everywhere.

A distinguishing feature of the reflexive modernization is the latency of risks, because many of them simply cannot be perceived by the human senses. Invisible risks play a significant role in the social sense, as the apparent need or visible wealth, as a result, is pushed into the background. In this regard the author draws attention to expert communities and expert knowledge, without which it is quite difficult for an ordinary person to live in the modern world. The illusion of the absence of danger is fuelled by these most invisible risks. The topical issue arises right here - the highest role of expert knowledge in the modern world. In fact, experts are the only ones who can reliably determine the degree and likelihood of risk occurrence. At this point an expert knowledge gains new political significance, which legitimizes general pollution, poor ecology, diseases and catastrophes. As the result, the institute of experts, responsible for determining the degree of riskiness of new technologies, as well as the mass media, spreading knowledge about them, occupy a rather important position in public life.

Experts in the risk society represent a kind of elite that regulates other's lives in no apparent way. As a result, society is polarized into those who have knowledge and have the right to interpret it in their own way and those who consume this knowledge. However, often distorted and incorrect information makes the rest of the population put it in question. In that case, Beck notes that the potential of all terrible catastrophes lies, in fact, in the collapse and failure of scientific, technical and legal rationality. As a result, between scientific and everyday rationality arises a conflict: *the origin of the critique of science and technology lies not in the 'irrationality' of the critics, but in the failure of techno scientific rationality in the face of growing risks and threats from civilization* (Beck 1992a). This confrontation in a risk society is inevitable, according to Beck, it should soon lead to their unification: *risk determinations are an unrecognized, still undeveloped symbiosis of the natural and the human sciences, of everyday and expert rationality, of interest and fact* (Beck 1992b). Essentially this symbiosis lies at the heart of the so-called collective approach in personnel management, where the expert community comprises not only top managers, but also ordinary employees.

Beck's risk is difficult to present without expertise, experts and expert knowledge. As noted by Beck the role of science changes significantly with the expansion of risk production, both in life and in politics. This, in turn, is associated with expert knowledge, because most of the risks arising from the success of scientific and technological modernization, and the most dangerous (nuclear weapons, genetic engineering, chemical weapons) are not perceived directly by human senses. These risks exist only in the form of expert knowledge of them. Beck also points out the social features of risk: the degree of risk depends, among other issues, on experts and expert knowledge.

3 Giddens abstract systems and expert conflicts

Giddens (1991) traces the development of expert systems in his work «Modern and Self Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age». It is important to bear in mind, that Giddens analyses society through the understanding of the relationship between social structures and social action. In his works on modernity, the author develops the theory of a modern "globalized" society. Giddens, as well as Beck, calls the modern stage in the development of social systems "late", "high" or "radicalized" modern. The scientist compares two epochs in a historical perspective - traditionalism and the era of modern, which, in fact, gave rise to modernity. Giddens reflects on globalizing macro-tendencies and personal dispositions and sets his sights: *"to analyse the nature of these interconnections and to provide a conceptual vocabulary for thinking about them"* (Giddens 1991). Expert systems here arise within the framework of abstract systems.

The author offers his views on the existence of such systems as symbolic signs (sign systems) and expert systems; together they form so-called abstract systems. It makes sense to dwell on these systems, as they are the key to understanding expert systems in the Giddens's works. Symbolic signs are understood as means of exchange, such as money. Although the means of exchange were existed earlier, now monetary systems are more

abstract and complicated. Expert systems are professional examination systems that organize our social environment. Expert systems, according to Giddens, surround us everywhere, ranging from the food we eat to the houses in which we live. All people, without exception, are participants of expert systems. Expert systems include expert knowledge that we need very often, for example at the doctor's or hairdresser. Here the author points out that expert knowledge is not only a kind of technical knowledge, but also social. Thus, abstract systems are an example of how space and time are dividing in modern times, how local and regional become secondary. Both of these mechanisms, according to Giddens, are impossible without the phenomenon of trust, which is the key moment in his study (Giddens 1991). Talking about an expert knowledge a certain technical knowledge, for example, cannot exist without trust, as the recipient of this knowledge itself does not have a proper understanding of it. Trust and safety, risk and danger are those features that describe the modernity.

On top of that, the author raises the problem of the reflexivity of modernity. This implies that in the era of high modernity there exists a constant need to revise existing knowledge. This, among other things, leads to the consequences that Beck (1992) talks about the gradually nascent doubts.

Giddens, moreover, draws our attention to one important fact about expertise and expert knowledge. He uses as an example the fact that in a traditional society there also existed experts, for example, magicians and sorcerers, who possessed inaccessible knowledge for the majority. Nowadays the situation is different - any person can get knowledge without turning to experts, with the expansion of the Internet, but whether one can correctly interpret it without experts (for example medical intelligence). Thence, in the era of the late modernity, any amateur can become an expert, that is fraught with great danger. As a result, true experts who have the proper education and skills are forced to spend time on self-improvement and to fight against "unreal" experts. All this creates even greater risks, mistrust, scepticism, which is the inalienable features of modern society.

The author returns to the topic of expertise and expert knowledge when discussing fate, risk and security. Giddens argues that "*a significant part of expert thinking and public discourse today is made up of risk profiling - analysing what, in the current state of knowledge and in current conditions, is the distribution of risks in given milieux of action*" (Giddens 1991). The climate of risk becomes permanent for modern residents. Of course, in traditional society there were risks too, however, now the situation has changed. Thanks to scientific and technological progress, society is able to manage risks associated with epidemics, natural disasters, but at the same time, it creates additional risks that only worsen the situation (markets, stock exchanges, etc.). We all become to be inhabitants in relation to the huge number of expert systems that surround us. Nowadays, there are not so many expert systems, where there exists an agreement between the experts, because the specialization often becomes narrower, and there is more and more information (including unreliable ones). According to the author, in the core of risk with significant consequences lies the fact that almost nobody controls experts. We all consciously interact with expert systems that help to reconstruct our self-identity; this fact reflects the problems that generates modernity. The "I-self" remains one on one with itself while choosing an expert system; the "I-self" is in eternal search and reflection on who to trust and who does not.

Giddens in the same vein, like Beck, raises in his studies the topic of modern society, which is based on risk. Risk and expert systems are very close to each other and are interdependent structures. Life in the era of high modernity is not easy; individuals are constantly faced with the choice to trust or not to experts, who are increasingly wrong. Presently the issue of the expert's knowledge limitations is raised more and more often. In the era of late modernity, the position of experts in society is changing: an expert is not one who has legitimate knowledge, but one whom do others recognize as an expert.

Berger and Luckmann (1996) anyway concern the ideas of experts and expert knowledge in their work "The Social Construction of Reality" (1966). Within the framework of the sociology of knowledge, the authors analyse the social conflict between experts and practitioners, as well as directly between experts. The essence of the conflicts lies in the fact that they may have a completely different definition of reality, which, in turn, leads to a misunderstanding in their circles. Experts, according to Berger and Luckmann, (1996) are the ones who are legitimized and have the right to determine reality. The emergence of expertise structures is associated with the emergence of so-called *semantic sub-universes* (1966). Groups and communities of experts support semantic sub-universes and create specialized meanings and definitions of reality. Conflicts may also arise between these groups. Within the semantic sub-universes there may be official and alternative definitions of reality, as there may be disagreements among experts. As Giddens and Beck, the authors focus on the increasingly complicated situation with the legitimization of expert knowledge, because the basic semantic sub-universes evolve over time. In this case, the scientists talk about the most developed semantic sub-universes - the symbolic ones, which are connected with the institutional order. Berger and Luckmann refer the expert systems to these symbolic sub-universes.

Moreover, the authors consider various types of experts who have ever existed and speak, for example, about the intellectual "*whose expertise is not wanted by the society at large*" (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Berger and Luckmann (1996) point out that intellectual are *counter-experts* (undesirable experts) in determining reality, because their society project is not presented in accordance with institutional programs, like expert's projects. As a result, their definition of reality can only be applied in their circle of intellectuals.

4 New leadership style in organization

Summing up the brief overview of existing sociological concepts of expert communities it is of importance to note, first, that this topic remains relevant to this day. In connection with the hard times that are happening in the world, it becomes clear that the failure of some expert systems and the incompetence of various representatives of expert communities can entail serious consequences.

In the reviewed studies, the topics of risk, trust, knowledge, expertise and non-professionalism are raised in common, as they are the direct features of modern society. In this regard, it seems appropriate to consider the issue of the existence of expert communities in modern organizations that surround us everywhere. Can we talk about their consistency or failure? Can the expert community become an actor of management decision making in an organization? Further research should focus on determining these features.

As was already mentioned, expert communities in organizations are usually created within the framework of the so-called collective management. By collective management is meant *a leadership style in which ordinary workers play an active role; they are directly involved in solving production issues* (Basovskiy and Protasyev 2001). The role of the leader in this case goes to the team, which, in many cases, only improves the social climate in the organization. According to authors, in the case of effective use of collective management, an organization will receive the following benefits:

- the level of product quality and production efficiency will increase;
- business activity will increase;
- communications channel will improve;
- employee loyalty (commitment) will increase;
- the goals of informal leaders will be closed to the goals of top management.

With regard to the above, Dolgushev (2017) shares the experience of introducing expert communities into the structure of the organization. As a rule, such experience really helps to achieve the goals of the organization. However, it is important to pay attention to the following factors: expert knowledge outside the organization and an established communication channel between the levels of the organization.

The author suggests examining the “picture of the world”, because without it, the managerial decisions will not be adequate to the situation. Therefore, it is advisable to involve outside experts for expert communities that need an external information. In practice, it looks like structured and systematized communication channel with customers, suppliers and partners. Beyond that, an important factor is the correct and direct channel of communication between the different levels of the organization (top management, middle management and low management). Moreover, right interaction with colleagues allows developing effective mechanisms for delegating authority and the correct distribution of roles and responsibilities in an organization. This prevents conflicts in the team and contributes to the employee’s manifestation of leadership skills.

5 Conclusions

Overall, it appears that the interaction within the expert community, the interaction of expert communities with each other, as well as the integration of expert communities into the structure of the organization has a systemic nature that guides the formation and use of collective knowledge to achieve the strategic goals of the organization. Well-proven system analysis tools are becoming more common for practical implementation the principles of systemic collective management in organization.

In order to sum up our results and discussions about the expert communities, we can conclude that their introduction into the structure of an organization can bring many positive points for organization’s development. This leadership style can be, to some extent, even innovative.

When it comes to the analysed data from studying sociological concepts about expert systems, it appears to be a very useful and applicable method of research in this situation. Our investigations into this area are still in progress and seem likely to confirm our hypothesis in the future using new pathways for further research.

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